

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000043

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR SA/FO AMBASSADOR QUINN, S/CT, SA/A
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
CENTCOM FOR POLAD, CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-76
STATE PLEASE PASS USAID
USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
TREASURY FOR APARAMESWARAN

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: INDEPENDENT ELECTION COMMISSION FACES
CHALLENGES

1. (SBU) Summary. The United Nations Development Program faces a USD 11 million shortfall from the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections and an additional 2.9 million for transition support to the new Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) Without additional assistance, the UNDP may sell off election assets to meet its debts. More importantly the IEC will not have the financial support it needs to become a credible, functioning national election commission and the international community may shoulder an even greater burden to fund and administer future elections in Afghanistan. End Summary.

Election Budget Shortfall Greater than Expected

2. (SBU) With the inauguration of the National Assembly on December 19, the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) dissolved and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) assumed all powers to administer and oversee electoral processes. While only three weeks old, the IEC is already facing serious budgetary and operational challenges. The UNDP, which oversees the election project on behalf of donors, faces unanticipated costs in both the budget for the 2005 parliamentary elections and in the transition and capacity-building budget for the new IEC.

3. (SBU) Higher-than-expected costs for ballot production and transportation increased the total cost for the 2005 Wolesi Jirga and Provincial Council elections by USD 9 million (from USD 159 million to USD 168 million). Combined with the unfunded amount from the election budget of USD 2.1 million, the total 2005 election deficit will be around \$11.1 million that must now be covered by the UNDP. The deficit is primarily owed to UNOPS, a sub-contractor to UNDP, responsible for election personnel, procurement, logistics, supplies, and equipment.

4. (SBU) The IEC also needs an additional USD 2.9 million in order to cover its own costs until March 20, when the GOA is expected to take over annual operational costs. The USD 2.9 million would cover salaries for IEC staff (national and 34 provincial staff), limited operational costs, 4 to 6 international experts, and electoral administrative training and civic education projects. This budget does not cover a future voter registration pilot project, annual operating costs, or the necessary delimitation of district and municipal constituency.

Transfer of Assets to IEC Begins

5. (SBU) An earlier agreement with UNDP and UNOPS that election assets would be transferred to the IEC, the provincial election offices, provincial councils, and the parliament has begun to be implemented. However, election commissioners have expressed concerns that computers, vehicles and phone equipment may be sold off to cover the deficit before the national and provincial IEC offices are adequately equipped. They also expressed a concern that governors in each province have been entrusted with the equipment and there are reports that equipment is missing. UNOPS also decided not to transport back to the Kabul the thousands of chairs, tables and voting screens used to equip the 26,000 polling stations. Instead, they are writing a proposal to UNDP to give these election assets to the "best community recipient" in each province and district. However, the best community recipient may be determined by UNOPS not to be the election offices or the provincial councils. Embassy and USAID election advisors are now in discussions with UNOPS to ensure that election assets are offered first to the

provincial election offices or the provincial councils.

Land Dispute on the Horizon

16. (SBU) The final challenge currently for the IEC is a land dispute - not an uncommon problem in Afghanistan. UNOPS built eight buildings on a large parcel of land supposedly owned by the Government of Afghanistan. However, a dispute has arisen between the President's office and several ministries about the land title. The IEC received a letter of eviction from the Ministry of Power and Water recently and the Education and the Mines and Industry Ministries have also laid claim to the land. The Election Commissioners are looking to President Karzai to settle the land ownership dispute.

Comment: Additional Aid to IEC Will be Needed

17. (SBU) These debts threaten to cripple the IEC before it has a chance to get off the ground, and could lead to additional GOA funding requests for future elections and current capacity-building projects, if not addressed soon. Without a functioning IEC, the international community may be asked once again to support administrative costs, and possibly administer elections currently being discussed for 2006 or 2007. The United States contributed USD 40 million in direct support to the 2005 UNDP election budget and \$500,000 to the IEC's transitional budget. Thus far, only the US and UNDP have made a donation for the IEC's transitional operations (UNDP has contributed \$400,000). The US will also provide an estimated USD 2-3 million in in-kind support (such as technical assistance, a resource center, public outreach, and training) over the next year to the IEC and its subsidiary bodies via its democracy development implementing partners such as NDI, IRI, TAF and IFES. The needs for the IEC are real, but we have already supplied the lion's share of the funding. It is now time for the other international donors to fill the gap. End Comment.

18. (SBU) Note: A December 19 letter from SRSG Jean Arnault to Ambassador Neumann requested donors pony up an additional USD 16 million, as well as solicit funds to cover the past deficits. The Ambassador will respond with a letter acknowledging Arnault's request, noting the importance of elections and the IEC, reminding the SRSG of the large contributions we have already made, but making no/no new commitments. End Note.

NEUMANN